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ABSTRACT

A case study of second language development in a college student focused on comparative changes in the development of oral and written skills over a period of two years. The subject was a Russian student of English as a second language who had recently arrived in the United States. Errors and syntactic maturity were analyzed in writing samples during this period, and compared with results of oral interviews used for placement. Results indicate that errors decreased and syntactic maturity increased in the same way that occurs in a first language. It is believed that time was a critical factor in self-monitoring, so errors would decrease faster in writing when more time was available. However, errors decreased in the subject's oral expression at a faster rate than in his writing, supporting the hypothesis that adults use the language monitoring function to a greater degree than do younger students. Contains 12 references. (MSE)

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A COMPARISON OF ORAL AND WRITING DEVELOPMENT IN A SECOND LANGUAGE COLLEGE STUDENT

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SUMMARY

This article describes research about writing and speech development in a second language college student. Errors and syntactic maturity were measured in his writing samples over the course of two years. These were compared to his oral interviews used for placement in the Language Institute at National-Louis University during the first year of the study.

It was found that errors decreased and syntactic maturity increased in the same way that occurs in a first language. It was believed that time was a critical factor in self-monitoring, so that errors would decrease faster in writing when more time is available. However, errors decreased in his oral expression at a faster rate than in his writing. This tends to confirm Krashen's hypothesis that adults use the monitoring function to a higher degree than do younger students.

A COMPARISON OF ORAL AND WRITING DEVELOPMENT IN A SECOND LANGUAGE COLLEGE STUDENT

With the increasing number of second language students at the college level, attention should be paid to some of the developmental processes involved in speaking and writing, so that instructors are better able to understand and facilitate their students' second language acquisition.

First language acquisition

Stubbs (1980) has discussed the ambivalence among theorists about whether oral or written language has primacy in modern society. While oral language historically and chronologically predates written language, the advent of written language has also had an impact on how people speak, as well as how we evaluate the quality of oral discourse.

In his study, Labov (1963) found that those subjects most proficient with language are the ones who most frequently use language to express tentativeness. Supposition, hypothesis, and conditional statements occur much less frequently in the spoken language of those lacking skill in language (Labov, p. 85).

The high group handled oral signals more effectively than the low group. Their skill at using pitch, stress, and pause, combined with the relative freedom from using partial structural patterns was impressive. Labov predicted that those pupils who

lack skill in using speech would have difficulty in mastering written tradition. That is competence in the spoken language appears to be a necessary base for competence in writing and reading (Labov, p. 88).

Rates of development

Do the two production areas of language, writing and speaking develop at the same rate? According to Harrell (1957), the average number of subordinate clauses in speaking and writing increase with age. Moreover, they are longer in written compositions than in oral expression after the eighth grade.

McNeill (1966) conducted research on aural/oral performance which indicated that children have acquired their full competence repertoires by the time they reach writing age at grade four. All kernel-type sentence types are used by fourth graders as well as twelfth graders.

In addition, Hunt (1964) found that all transformations which operate on embedded sentences are acquired by the youngest writers. Adults, on the other hand, write two and one-third fewer T-units per given number of words than young children. (A T-unit is defined as any main clause with all of its modifying phrases.) Therefore, the hallmark of mature writing is the ability to say more with every statement.

Syntactic maturity in first language writing development was also studied by Mellon (1969) and O'Hare (1971). Total number of words, average errors per 100 words, total T-units, average words per T-unit and average clauses per T-units were measured.

Second language acquisition

However, are there differences when it is a second rather than a first language that is being acquired? According to Brown (1987), correct production can give little information regarding interlanguage, the linguistic system that is created by and which lies between a learner's native and target languages as he/she is acquiring the forms of the second language. Nevertheless, an analysis of the errors made in the written productions of second language learners can help determine the process and underlying production competence of second language learners.

Oral Discourse Analysis

Oral language assessment must take place in a meaningful communication context where normal communicative cues are provided (Slaughter, 1988). The various aspects of communication cannot be understood in isolation from one another because these features are not separate cues in meaning.

Moreover, it is important that criteria appropriate for examining oral language be distinguished from criteria more appropriate to the evaluation of written language.

Psycholinguists like Goodman (1979) and Cummins (1983) believe writing is more decontextualized than is oral language. It is for this reason that Cummins and Shuy (1978) have warned against only using oral expression as a gauge for second language proficiency. On the surface, adults tend to presume higher

levels of proficiency for language which is similar in form to that used in decontextualized written texts. Lambert (1975) found that among immigrant students in Canada, it took nearly ten years to reach a level of language proficiency required for decontextualized academic written work.

Like the speech a mother uses with her child in a first language called "motherese," there is another type of verbal interaction which occurs when a native speaker and second language learner converse (Ellis, 1985). So called "foreigner" speech by the native speaker is another adjustment like motherese that is made when language is simplified in order to communicate. Motherese, foreigner talk, and "pidgins" are thought to be the result of a single underlying process of language acquisition.

Because the contribution of the native speaker and the second language learner or foreigner do affect each other, it is the joint work done during the discourse that is assessed (Slaughter). The physical situation, the linguistic context (the way something that is said relates to what was said previously), and the social context (the social meaning of the communicative situation for the participants) are factors which impact on all oral interactions and which are the basis for the oral assessment.

Oral Interviews

Since the Language Institute utilizes a traditional audiolingual behavioristic paradigm of instruction, placement in

Levels I through V of the Language Institute is primarily based on the student's oral interviews. These are conducted when the student first arrives, after Level III and at the conclusion of Level V. These interviews are taped and permanently retained.

The instrument that is used to measure students' communicative competencies based on the way speaking and listening function in ordinary social contexts is a version of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Oral Interview. The FSI Interview has high reliability because it takes place in a more or less natural setting and is believed to be a good determinant of a person's true language competence. Its major drawback is that it is time-consuming and expensive to administer and score (Hendricks, Scholz, Spurling, Johnson, & Vandenburg, 1980).

Case Study Subject

Our study involved a college second language student from Russia. After counting errors and syntactic maturity in his writing development over the course of two years, we decided to do the same for his formal Language Institute oral interviews. We wanted to determine if the same pattern of development reported for first language acquisition was apparent for a second language college student. Therefore, errors and syntactic maturity in his writing samples (Table 1) were compared to his Language Institute oral interviews (Table 2).

Table 1

ERRORS/SYNTACTICAL MATURITY

Composition	Total Words	Av.Errors/ 100 words	Total T-units	Av.Words/ T-units	Total Av.Clauses/ T-units
Level I					
1.Classmate	222	8	35	6.34	1.17
2. Monday	275	12	27	10.18	1.81
3. Apartment	306	10	27	11.33	1.29
4. City	274	16	29	9.44	1.06
5. Family (mid-term)	267	15	34	7.85	1.20
6. Zhanna	293	12	28	10.46	1.50
7. Neighbor	187	12	17	11.00	1.58
8. Restaur.	247	9	28	8.82	1.18
Average	259	13	28	9.10	1.35
Level II					
1. Hometown**	575	14	34	16.91	1.67
2. Jerusalem	378	12	27	14.00	1.66
Average	476	13	35	15.45	1.66
Level III					
1. Helen	754	12	49	15.38	1.75
2. Typical	914	3.1	53	17.24	1.75
Average	834	7.5	51	16.31	1.75
Level IV					
1. New Year's	76	12	11	6.90	1.36
2. Person I Remember**					
Part I	244	7.0	12	20.33	1.66
Part II	1080	6.7	60	18.00	1.78

Table 1 (continued)

	Total Words	Av.Err/ 100 Words	Total T-units	Av.Words/ T-units	Av.Cl./ T-units
Part III	640	9.0	39	16.41	1.71
Average		8.6			1.71
3. Composit.	1053	4.0	63	16.71	1.68
4. Decision	567	6.0	20	28.35	3.25
Average		6.5	39	19.76	2.01
<u>Post-Level V</u>					
1. Testim.* (think-aloud)	144	3.0	7	20.57	1.57
2. Recomm. * ** (process)	592	0.5	27	21.92	1.62
<u>Level VI</u> (Truman College)					
1. Why here? (in class)	99	3.0	4	24.75	2.75
2. Vietnam* (process)	607	2.0	23	26.39	1.95
3. Rosemary	441	2.1	21	21.00	2.42
4. Brownsville**	160	7.0	11	22.85	2.00
5. Final Exam I (in class)	496	6.0	24	20.66	2.33
Average		4.02	17	23.13	2.29
<u>Level VII</u> (Truman College)					
1. American Experience (in class)	174	2.0	9	19.30	1.77
2. Sandwich** (in class)	305	2.66	16	19.25	1.62
3. Final Exam II** (in class)	870	2.37	39	22.3	1.90
Average		2.34	21	20.28	1.76

*Composed while being observed
**Favorite topics chosen by case study subject

Table 2

Language Institute Oral Interviews

	Total Words	Errors 100/words	Av.Words/ T-units	Av.Cl./ T-units
Interview #1 (Pre-Level I)	154	12	6.16	1.08
Interview #2 (Post-Level III)	225	2.5	7.50	1.03
Interview #3 (Post-Level V)	691	1.0	16.07	1.32

Accuracy of the oral assessment

Interviewed by three different instructors, Sasha was always assessed as being at a higher level than where he actually was, an observation reported by Cummins.

Level I Interview

Interviewer: OK. Where are you from?

Sasha: I am from Ukraine.

Interviewer: How long have you been in the states?

Sasha: One month.

Interviewer: One month? A short time.... Did you study English in Uraine?

Interviewer: You were here before?

Sasha: No...

Interviewer: You've been here since February? One month?

Sasha: And a half...

Interviewer: For one month? But where did you study in Ukraine? You learned everything in one week?

Sasha: Yes, I very much studied.

Errors in oral and written productions

The average number of errors per 100 words during the first oral interview was 12 per 100 words. This can be compared to the average of 13 errors per 100 written words in Level I. However, the average spoken words per T-units (6.16) was closer to the average (6.34) in his first written compostion, "Classmate." Average spoken clauses in his first interview per T-unit (1.08) was lower in the oral interview than the average for written words in Level I (1.355). but close to the 1.06 he wrote in "My city."

This difference can be explained in part by the fact that as with all entering students, Sasha was interviewed before his Level I classes had begun, while the written compositions were produced after he had been attending his Level I class.

After Level III, errors per 100 words during his oral interview had dropped dramatically from 12 to 2.5, around the level found in the "Typical student" composition of Level III. Surprisingly, average words per T-unit at 7.5 was only slightly higher during oral speech in his second interview than they were before Level I (6.16) in his first oral interview. Average clauses per T-unit also remained about the same at 1.03 compared to 1.08 before Level I.

Sasha's post-Level V oral interview indicated that he had virtually eliminated all errors. It had now dropped to 1 error per 100 words. This can partly be explained by a strategy of consistent use of his language monitor (Krashen, 1983). Adult

second language learners utilize the rules of grammar to a greater extent than do children, according to Krashen.

Syntactic maturity of oral and written productions

When the Level V oral interview words per T-unit (16.07) is compared to his written compositions from all levels, Sasha was very close to all the written compositions he had produced in Level III and afterwards witht the exception of "Decision" at 28.35 words per T-unit. From that point on, his written compositions all ranged around 20 words per T-unit.

Even more significant perhaps is the doubling of average words per T-unit in his oral interviews from 7.5 after Level III to 16.07 after Level V. This too is comparable to the average number of words per T-unit found in his level III written compostions.

Average clauses per T-unit in the third oral interview (after Level V) also increased by one-third to 1.32 over the number of clauses per T-unit during his second oral interview after Level III. Despite this large increase in syntactic maturity in Sasha's oral expression between levels III and V, his written syntactic maturity was consistently higher than his oral expression at the same level. In fact, his oral syntactic maturity was no higher than the average clauses per T-unit in his Level I compositions (1.35) over a year earlier.

Self-monitoring

An example of his self-monitoring is also evident in his

Level V interview:

Interviewer: What instrument do you play?

Sasha: Piano, but this is not my major...uh, ...a former EH(!) future, maybe, future conductor, and I graduated in Ukraine. I...am a music teacher...Theory of Music and choir director for now.

Interviewer: Since you're a teacher, how would you teacher a language class or what would you do differently from the teachers that you've had?

Sasha:All methods worked for me. First, J.R. She, you know, helped me to step into the lnaguage, so very good beginning. She answered all my qeustions I had at that time, and that was a good push.

Interviewer: ...Um hum...

Sasha: Is that a noun?

Interviewer: What, "push?"

Sasha: push

Interviewer: No, that's a...yeah, that's a noun.

Sasha: ...for me to continue getting better...my language.

Implications

These results appear to corroborate Harrell's (1957) observation that there is greater syntactic maturity in writing than there is in oral expression after the eighth grade in a first language, but also in a second language.

Sasha wrote more with each statement only after having left

the Language Institute except for "Decision." In Level VI, he consistently wrote over two caluses per T-unit. This level of embedding dropped off in Level VII, perhaps as a result of being able by that time to say more with fewer words. His retrospective interviews revealed his growing awareness of the differences in rhetorical styles between Russian and English writers--to be more exact, simpler and shorter in number of total words when writing in English.

Care must be given to assessing a student's second language, since oral speech is more contextualized than is writing and may not indicate the true level of a student's language proficiency for academic requirements.

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GUIDELINES FOR THE ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW

Language Institute--National-Louis University*

The point of the oral proficiency interview is to elicit "natural speech" from the speaker and to maintain a brief conversation that will allow the interviewer to form a global evaluation of a person's language proficiency. Since the purpose of this assessment is to obtain a GLOBAL measure of language proficiency, the interviewer need not focus on specific aspects of the language, such as mastery of the irregular past tense or subject-verb number agreement, or control of the fricatives. Rather, by carefully following the proficiency descriptions provided in the interview form the interviewer should be able to give a global rating on each of the five aspects of language: Accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

The following steps may be taken:

1. Put the person at ease.

2. Introduce yourself and let the person introduce him/herself.

3. Start by asking questions that require simple answers.

   - What country are you from?

   -How long have you been in the U.S.?

4. Proceed by asking student more open-ended questions:

   -Do you remember your first day in the U.S.? Tell me about it.

   -Do you watch television? Tell me about your favorite program.

   -What's your favorite food? Tell me why you like it.

*Adaptation of the Foreign Service Institute English Language Oral Interview

PLACEMENT IN NLU'S ESOL PROGRAM

summary of grammar skills taught at each level in program:

Level 1: BE verb, present continuous and simple present, basic pronouns, beginning level listening and speaking tasks
Level 2: simple past and past continuous, used to, future and BE going to, reflexive pronouns, two word verbs, tense contrast
Level 3: present perfect and present perfect continuous, modals, passives, past perfect, gerunds and infinitives
Level 4: connectors for independent and dependent clauses, prepositional phrases, past perfect, perfect modals for conditionals, adjective clauses, reported speech
Level 5: general verb review, all tenses, perfect modal, future perfect, review of articles, embedded questions, noun clauses
WSD: intensive writing review, especially of Level 4/5 structures

these English classes come after completing the ESOL program:

CD: making formal oral presentations, preparation for formal academic work among native speakers
Fundamentals of Composition: compositions in various rhetorical modes with native speaker students

Overall Rating	Level
.0 - 1.5	1
1.6 - 2.5	2
2.6 - 3.5	3
3.6 - 4.5	4, 5, WSD
4.6 - 5.5	5, WSD, CD

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placement out of ESOL program

5.6 +	CD, Fundamentals

Name of Student _____ **Date** _____